

**MENDESIA FARINELLA (THUNB.) (LEP.: ELACHISTIDAE):
A MOTH TO LOOK FOR IN BRITAIN**

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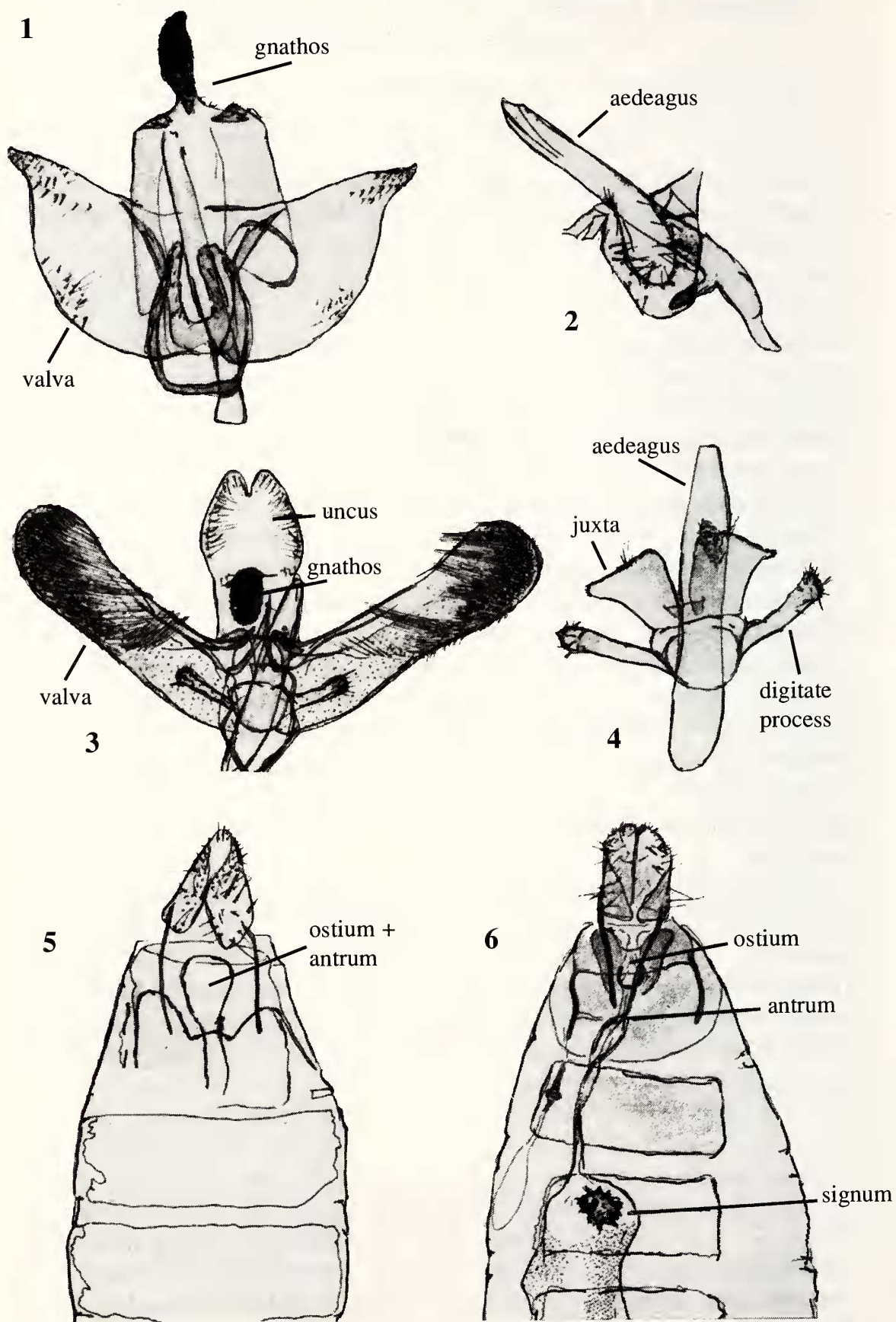
It is fifty years since a specimen of the Western Palaearctic elachistid *Mendesia farinella* (Thunberg) was discovered in the Hawkshaw collection at Cambridge (Bradley, 1950). The specimen, a male with data label inscribed "Dover, 25.7.1897 (sp. no. 6394 C.H.)", was apparently collected by Hawkshaw and included in his series of the common, white *Elachista argentella* (Clerck), which is often seen in May and June. At the time it was detected, no diary or notebook could be traced that might provide further details of its history. So far, no other record of *farinella* is known from south-east England or elsewhere in the British Isles, and its status here is uncertain (Bradley, 2000: species number 591).

The discovery of the specimen in the Hawkshaw collection was a result of an inspired search by Edouard Janmouille, of Brussels. He was aware (Janmouille, 1945; 1947) that specimens of *farinella* had been found mixed with *argentella* in continental collections. In one case they were believed to represent a new species and described and named as *Mendesia subargentella* Dattin (1932), and only later found to be conspecific with *farinella*. Janmouille surmised that as *farinella* has a wide western distribution in continental Europe, its range extending from Finland, Sweden and Denmark southwards to France and Italy, it might occur in Britain but be overlooked because of confusion with *argentella*; hence his quest to examine British material and the discovery of the Hawkshaw specimen.

Although *farinella* is widely distributed in Europe, it is apparently elusive and its life history is unknown. It may occur in grassy habitats with *argentella*, but the foodplant(s) of the larva is believed to be a borage (Boraginaceae) and not grasses (Poaceae) like that of *argentella*. The closely related *M. echiella* Joannis, which occurs in Spain, Portugal, Sardinia and Sicily, feeds on Viper's-bugloss (*Echium* sp.), mining a leaf and pupating on its surface.

Identification

The adults of *M. farinella* and *E. argentella* are alike in general appearance, with almost plain white forewings and greyish hind wings. Size seems to be an unreliable criterion, since Traugott-Olsen (1977: 39, plate-fig. 1) and Bland (1996: 362, plate 17) both give the wingspan for *farinella* as 12-14 mm and that for *argentella* as 11-12 mm., but depict *argentella* as being much the larger.



Figures 1 – 6: Genitalia of *Mendesia farinella* (Thunb.) and *Elachista argentella* (Cl.):
 Figs. 1, 2 & 5: *Mendesia farinella* (1: ♂ - ventral view; 2: aedeagus; 5: ♀ - ventral view.
 Figs. 3, 4 & 6: *Elachista argentella* (3: ♂ - ventral view; 4 - aedeagus; 6: ♀ - ventral view

Mendesia farinella Antenna finely ciliate, especially in male, rough-scaled; male genitalia (Figs. 1, 2) with valva broad, peaked apically, uncus not developed, gnathos elongate, digitate process undeveloped; female genitalia (Fig. 5) with ostium bursae and antrum bulbous, corpus bursae without signum.

Elachista argentella Antenna not ciliate, scales loosely appressed; male genitalia (Figs. 3, 4) with valva narrow-elongate, rounded distally, uncus large, incised, gnathos short-ovate, digitate process slender-elongate, juxta broadly triangulate-quadrate; female genitalia (Fig. 6) with U-shaped sclerotised medial area around ostium, antrum narrow, signum present as an irregular platelet with dentate margins.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Observations of the egg-laying behaviour of the Argent and Sable moth *Rheumaptera hastata* (L.)(Lep.: Geometridae)

The UK BAP moth project is looking for suitable sites to study the egg-laying and larval behaviour of the Argent and Sable *Rheumaptera hastata* in lowland woodland. Sites with strong populations are needed.